Careers Service

Career Mentoring Programme

Guide for Mentors
2015/16
1. The Career Mentoring Programme: Summary

Aim

The aim of the Career Mentoring Programme is to encourage students at Heriot-Watt University to focus on their career planning and development. The programme is run by the Careers Service at the university.

Essential criteria for mentors

- Graduate of any university.
- Working in a position which is at least graduate level.

Time commitment

You will be expected to meet with your mentee at least twice each semester, i.e. at least four times between October and May. Investing time early in the relationship has been found to be especially productive. You can, however, meet with your mentee as often as both of you deem practicable.

What will be expected of you?

It is difficult to stipulate what to do as a mentor, as it very much depends on what the student wants and what you are able to offer. However, our experience has shown that students value:

- Discussing their career options and suggestions of how to achieve them.
- Gaining an insight into the world of work, perhaps through job shadowing their mentor.
- Meeting your work colleagues and perhaps networking with your contacts in the industry.

The main requirements to be an effective mentor are:

- **Commitment** - Both you and your mentee are very busy people, so to make the relationship work you need to devote the necessary time and energy to it. Like everything else in life, the more you put in, the more you will get out.

- **Action** - Mentoring requires action. Results can only be achieved by meeting your student regularly.

- **Supporting** - Include objective setting, communicating ideas, coaching, and help with career planning.

- **Networking** - It is of great benefit if, where appropriate, you can put your mentee in touch with your industry contacts.

"A fantastic opportunity to speak to someone who has studied the same course and has gone on to pursue a career in [my] desired field."

"After receiving an offer for an interview for a summer placement, my mentor put me in touch with someone he knew, who worked for the company to give me advice, and I got the job!!"
2. Mentoring: What exactly is it?

A supportive relationship

Mentoring is essentially a means by which individuals learn and develop. Yet it is different from a number of other learning situations as it is a relationship between two people, and this is highlighted in most formal definitions of mentoring, e.g. “a protected relationship where experimentation, exchange and learning can occur, and skills, knowledge and insight can be developed”.

As with all successful business relationships, mentoring involves regular meeting between the parties involved, and a willingness to make the relationship work.

By becoming involved in the Career Mentoring Programme, it is important to understand that you will have to devote time and commitment to the relationship - whether you are a mentor or a mentee.

3. What’s in it for me?

Why get involved?

Through mentoring a student you will have an important effect on their career and perhaps even their life! You will be able to share the knowledge and insights that you have gained from your own and others’ experiences with a young person who is aspiring to be a successful professional in your field.

Previous mentors have stated that they became involved because of reasons such as wanting to encourage graduates into their field, wanting to ‘give something back’ by helping undergraduates at their previous university, and seeing mentoring as a way of developing their own ‘people skills’.

Mentors have reported various benefits, which are both professional and personal:

“Through mentoring, I broadened my own coaching and caring skills.”

“It created another professional network for me to be involved in.”

“It’s been rewarding to see the reaction to what is fairly basic advice - it emphasised what I had learned over the years.”

“It has improved my objective-setting, counselling and facilitating skills.”

Time commitment

There will obviously be an element to this aspect of mentoring, mainly:

- The initial meeting with the mentee, of about two hours maximum.
- Regular meetings - at least a further three meetings. This can vary and could be one-to-one meetings of one hour, or could involve the mentee shadowing you for a day at your place of work.
- Final evaluation and review, probably about two hours - maybe over lunch!
Scheduling meetings

As a mentor you will have a busy work schedule and students will have peaks and troughs of work demands in their own academic programmes. We strongly recommend that both parties agree their future schedules - as far as is feasible - at the outset of the relationship, so that each party can be sensitive to the demands of the other. We suggest that you consult with your mentee about their holidays, exams and any other commitments and put them into a planner together with your own holidays or particularly busy work times.

The first meeting with your mentee should provide the basis of the direction of the partnership. It requires an honest and open exchange of information about backgrounds, experience, achievements, aspirations and expectations.

Some specific elements of the relationship could be:

- Setting out a plan of action with your mentee - including the number of times that you both think you should meet (about twice a term is reasonable).
- Meeting soon after the initial contact to establish the relationship and set an agenda that could include advice about CVs, interview techniques, networking, career planning etc.
- Discussing your mentee’s needs at the outset and identifying appropriate ways in which you can help to meet them.
- At the end of each meeting, ensuring that an agenda and date are set for the next meeting.
- Your mentee may wish to use the pro-forma diary sheets to facilitate this process.
- Being prepared to talk about your failures as well as your successes.

Depending on the specific needs of your mentee, some objectives of the relationship could include the following:

- Explaining how your organisation works.
- Offering an insight into your particular role.
- Helping to build their self-confidence.
- Listening to problems they might have with their subject.
- Offering challenging ideas regarding their career options.

It is worth highlighting that past experience indicated the importance of mentors playing a proactive role in the relationships and ‘taking the lead’ in making arrangements. This is particularly appropriate as mentees may be slightly in awe of the mentor - at least at the outset - and uncomfortable about making suggestions for meetings.

“I usually email my mentor if I have a query or any news, which works quite well.”

“My mentor mapped out several clear options that I have, and thanks to them I feel much more prepared for starting work.”
4. Effective Mentors

The diagram below shows the key characteristics of an effective mentor;

- Credibility in own field
- Access to resources and information
- Genuine interest in seeing younger people advance
- Sufficient time
- Being secure of your own position
- Good understanding of your own organisation
- Having own network of contacts and influence and being prepared to share
- Good record of developing other people
- Able to command respect
- Patience with good interpersonal skills
- Good motivator
- Able to advise and instruct without ‘judging’
- Willing and able to relate to problems

Advice: to give or not to give?

Even if the mentees initially think they need advice on a particular topic, in fact most do not want advice as such. From the feedback of past mentees on other programmes, it is apparent that, while they appreciate someone going to the trouble of working out a solution for them, they do not always wish to take such advice! What they actually want is someone to listen to their issue or problem and to ask the questions, or provide information so that they come up with their own solution. Hence the importance of your listening and questioning skills. Helping mentees to work through their own solutions will not only increase their self-confidence, but will also help to ensure that the mentee does not become over dependent on you as a mentor.

In summary, therefore, mentoring involves empowering, enhancing and facilitating rather than directing, advising or telling.
If any problems arise, please do not hesitate to contact:

Karen Beattie  
Career Mentoring Programme Co-ordinator  
Careers Service  
Heriot-Watt University  
Netherdale  
Galashiels  
TD1 3HF  
t: 01896 892157  
f: 0131 451 3389  
e: mentoring@hw.ac.uk  
w: http://www.hw.ac.uk/careers/mentor.php

Support for mentors
This will involve a number of elements:

- Initial contact by the Career Mentoring Programme co-ordinator.
- Contact will be maintained with you throughout by the programme co-ordinator to ensure that the match is working well.
- Discussing your mentee’s needs at the outset and identifying appropriate ways in which you can help to meet them.
- At the end of each meeting, ensuring that an agenda and date are set for the next meeting. Your mentee may wish to use the pro-forma diary sheets to facilitate this process.
- Being prepared to talk about your failures as well as your successes.

FINAL CHECKLIST

- Assess your own strengths and weaknesses and think about how you can use them to the best advantage in this mentoring relationship.
- Invest time early in the relationship to establish a rapport and a regular schedule for discussions.
- Be prepared to offer feedback to your mentee which is clear, honest, constructive and designed to build confidence and ongoing commitment.
- Be aware of the distinction between counselling and advising, and whenever possible encourage your mentee to work out their own solution with you acting only as a sounding board.